

2005 Accomplishments

In his role as County Council Vice-President, George Leventhal continued his efforts to improve the quality of life for all Montgomery County residents. Among his accomplishments in 2005 were:

1. Montgomery Cares

Councilmember Leventhal ensured that funding for the Montgomery Cares health care program was increased by \$3 million in the FY2006 budget, bringing the program's total budget to \$5 million. The goal of Montgomery Cares is to extend basic health care access to 40,000 uninsured county residents by 2010, with medical care and prescriptions provided by a network of "safety net" clinics throughout the county. The program is projected to operate on a budget of \$15- \$20 million per year, and will help treat residents who have been left without medical care in light of recent state budget cuts.

2. Local Small Business Reserve

Councilmember Leventhal was among the original sponsors and strongest supporters of legislation that passed the County Council in April requiring county government departments to set aside 10 percent of their procurement opportunities for local small businesses. The bill also requires county departments to post contracting opportunities on the internet, so that county small businesses can be better aware of openings. This legislation will broaden the pool of competition for government contracts, and will ensure that more county residents benefit from these opportunities.

3. Clean Energy Rewards Program

Councilmember Leventhal sponsored the Clean Energy Rewards program, which was unanimously passed by the Council in March. The bill provides an energy tax refund to county residents who get their electricity from renewable sources, such as wind power, solar power, and energy generated from landfill gas. An estimated 2000 to 3000 County residents are eligible for the rewards program, and the rebate is expected to serve as an incentive for many more energy users—both businesses and individuals—to turn to clean, non-polluting sources.

4. Mental Health Services for Children

Following up on his work in the FY2005 budget, Councilmember Leventhal provided the second installment of \$125,000 for the construction of a new pediatric mental health facility at Potomac Ridge Behavioral Health Center in Rockville. This facility will fulfill one of the goals of the Blue Ribbon Task Force on Mental Health, by providing the first inpatient treatment beds for mentally ill children in the County.

5. Other Budget Accomplishments

In the final reconciliation list of the FY06 Operating Budget, Councilmember Leventhal successfully obtained funding for many of his budget priorities. Among these were \$200,000 for CASA of Maryland, which serves the needs of immigrants from Central American; \$150,000 for IMPACT Silver Spring, which works to bridge

racial, cultural, and class divisions in the county; \$50,000 for Aunt Hattie's Place, a residential facility that provides a stable, long-term home for young boys in foster care; \$40,000 for Catholic Charities, which provides social services to those in need; and \$22,000 for Identity, Inc, an organization that serves the growing Latino youth population in the county.

6. Revised Council Grants Process

As Chair of the County Council Health and Human Services Committee, Councilmember Leventhal led the way in restructuring the Council's process of distributing grants to community development organizations. Under the new system, human service organizations submit an application that is then evaluated by a review panel, which in turn makes its recommendations to the Council. The revised process allows for increased transparency, accessibility, and inclusiveness. Councilmember Leventhal also passed a motion transferring all arts and humanities funding to the Arts and Humanities Council of Montgomery County, which will similarly ensure greater transparency and better access to funding for arts and humanities organizations.

7. Food Marketing Practices Aimed at Children

Building on a series of community meetings held in 2004, Councilmember Leventhal continued to address the problem of childhood obesity. Councilmember Leventhal introduced a resolution that highlighted unhealthy food marketing practices aimed at children in Montgomery County, and called on companies that do business in the County to improve both the nutritional quality of their products and the marketing methods they use. In November, Councilmember Leventhal chaired a meeting of the Health and Human Services Committee at which representatives of the grocery, advertising and restaurant industries discussed their efforts to promote healthy eating and fitness to young people.

8. Youth Risk Behavior Survey

Councilmember Leventhal persuaded Montgomery County Public Schools (MCPS) Superintendent Jerry Weast to implement the Youth Risk Behavior Survey, which will aid education and health officials in understanding student life. The survey asks students about tobacco, alcohol and drug use, diet and physical activity, and behaviors that may result in violence. Superintendent Weast pledged \$60,000 in November for the YRBS, and the results are expected to give public health and MCPS officials a better understanding of health and behavioral risks among county youth.

9. Mirant Dickerson plant

In an effort to require the coal-fired Mirant plant in Dickerson to reduce its polluting emissions, Councilmember Leventhal spoke at a public hearing before the Maryland Department of Environment. The national advocacy group the Environmental Integrity Project named Mirant's Dickerson plant one of the 50 dirtiest power plants in the country, and it is the single biggest source of air pollution in Montgomery County. Citing Mirant's high levels of such harmful emissions as

mercury, carbon dioxide, sulfur dioxide, and nitrogen oxide, Councilmember Leventhal called on Mirant to cut its pollution through the installation of new technologies, and to support a bill pending before the Maryland General Assembly to reduce these pollutants. He authored an op-ed in the Washington Post in January calling on the General Assembly to pass the “four pollutants” bill.

10. Recycling

Councilmember Leventhal included language in the county’s Recycling Policy requiring eateries and grocery stores to provide receptacles for their customers to recycle bottles and cans.

11. Signs for Non-Profit Organizations

Councilmember Leventhal proposed a sign fee waiver for nonprofit and service organizations, which was then unanimously approved by the County Council. Prior to Councilmember Leventhal’s bill, civic groups such as the Lions, Rotary and Kiwanis were required to pay fees for installing their logo signs in the community, at prices five to ten times the rate of neighboring counties. With the passage of Councilmember Leventhal’s zoning text amendment, the Department of Permitting Services now has the authority to reduce or waive the sign posting fee for community service organizations.